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ABSTRACT

Competitive forensic teams should turn to their students for leadership. Such an approach gives students valuable experience in handling responsibility, while relieving school administrators of some of the tasks involved in debate competition. Since forensic students are intelligent and highly ambitious, they should be leaders of debate programs, not just competitors. The appropriate leadership paradigm is a situational one. A leader must understand the situation he or she is in, recognize the personalities involved, and adapt his or her leadership style accordingly. In addition, a leader must view a situation through the eyes of a follower, and understand what motivates a follower to perform. Communication between leaders and followers is essential. In the debate setting, the leader must recognize the goal of participation in speech competitions. More specific team goals must be prioritized. The leader must be able to act as manager, rationally assessing situations and allocating resources to achieve goals. Even as a follower, the future leader can learn group personalities and can learn about problem-solving. Good communication promotes clarity of policy and action, and improves preparation. The forensic program is an outstanding opportunity to develop leadership skills that can someday make students great. (SG)

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Student Leadership in Forensic Programs

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The word "leadership" is a relatively new addition to the English language. Although the word "leader" has been in common usage for more than six centuries, the concept of leadership was not used until very recently (afterword Rosenbach, Taylor). With this addition came an enormous amount of studies, research and information about leadership. Yet, there are few subjects that have received so much attention with so few definitive answers. We cannot seem to quantify it; we cannot grasp it; we cannot even seem to define it adequately. Yet, leadership has had a profound impact on our lives and on society.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to clear all these ambiguities. However, obscure as it may be in general, we must still recognize the importance of leadership, as well as how we can use it to benefit ourselves. Studying leadership in specific situations allows us to avoid many of these problems (Pfeffer 109). The application of leadership in an environment common to many of us--that of a competitive speech team--is the goal of this paper. My purpose is therefore two-fold. First, I'll present arguments why forensic teams ought to turn to their students to provide leadership, and secondly, I'll explain a leadership paradigm designed for students on a speech team. This dual purpose will allow us to recognize the specific importance of leadership in forensics and how to develop those leadership skills.

WHY STUDENT LEADERSHIP?

A student emphasis is the latest aspect of leadership. Schools have long had student leadership within the framework of the institution itself, but there has been a renewed emphasis on this subject. Papers have been written, studies have been conducted, and many people have made their living by traveling to schools to present "how-to" seminars for effective student leadership. There are at least two reasons for this surge in interest in effective student leadership: (1) it gives students valuable experience in handling responsibility, and (2) it creates an environment of "burden-sharing,", i.e., the administrators of the school are relieved of certain tasks, while allowing the students to have some control over a major aspect of their lives. Students have now begun running all types of competitive sports teams, school clubs, and have even involved themselves in the bureaucracy of the school administration itself. Student leadership is a new face for our educational system.

A recent addition to the family of student-led activities is the competitive speech, or forensic, team. There have been few teams which have taken the evolutionary step to couple student leadership with the existing guidance of the directors. I call this an evolutionary step because I believe this is how forensics will function in the future. Right now, the genesis of student-leadership in this field is already apparent. Forensic teams are turning to student coaching. Students are

deciding which competitions to attend and who should go to represent their school. More and more responsibility is placed upon the shoulders of the competitors, responsibilities that can affect the performance of the team. The trend in forensics is definitely towards more student involvement and student influence impacting the team.

Why is the study of student-leadership, especially on a forensic team, important? There are several reasons. First, there is necessity. We are faced every day with new fiscal cuts or restraints which require fewer people to do more work. It is already the case at several schools that resources are so tight that funding for forensic programs no longer exist. In some of these cases, students have had to take over in order for a forensic team to even exist. This is exactly what occurred at Colorado University, Boulder. The professor who was serving as coach was transferred. No one else offered to take the opened faculty position, presumably due to the demands of the job. Consequently, students have been leading Colorado University's forensic team since 1987.

A second reason to integrate student leadership into forensics is, simply, that's how it ought to be. The competitors on a team should be more than just competitors--they should be leaders, as well. Most forensic students are intelligent persons with high career ambitions. They should be given every opportunity to exercise their leadership skills and demonstrate their capabilities to handle responsibility. Added to this reason, the influence the students can exert through

their leadership roles can help improve performance. It has been demonstrated time and time again that a person will perform better when he or she actually has some influence on the decisions that affect him or her. As the ones competing, the students ought to have input in the decision-making process which affects them.

Simply put, many teams will be faced with the need to address the issue of student leadership. In many cases, the transition to student leadership in forensics is already underway. Whether a team makes the choice to turn to student leadership because they want to or because they must, the fact is, at some point they will be faced with the decision about whether or not to integrate more student involvement.

IN SEARCH OF A PARADIGM

What constitutes leadership? The massive amount of research on this subject proposes that we must answer the question relative to what situation a "leader" is in. Therefore, we need to have a paradigm. Without a paradigm, any analysis seems unfounded and wanders aimlessly. Furthermore we need a paradigm broad enough to encompass all aspects of leadership but with the flexibility to apply the principles of that paradigm on specific issues. In my research to date, I have not read of any such paradigm, especially one specific to a student-led forensic team. By combining several researchers' opinions, however, we can establish such a broad yet useful paradigm.

Through my research and my own experiences as a student leader I believe leadership is situational, but not in the traditional sense of situational theory. Traditional situational theory is flawed because it discards any influence a leader may have. Situational theory states that conditions, not anything a person may do or say, determine who will emerge as the leader. A contingency model of leadership approach fails also. This approach states the leader will emerge as a result of a combination of individual traits and conditions. Such an approach does not suit our needs, because it extrapolates such ideas into a conclusion that there are only two types of leaders: task-oriented and person-oriented. Based on my experience, the contingency model is not always correct,

especially on a forensic team, where a leader must be and, from my observation, usually is oriented towards both people and tasks. Rather, the theory we need would assume that just as there are different personalities which respond to different stimuli, a leader must be flexible enough to respond to different followers and different situations. Within the context of a specific situation, the leadership style changes. Consequently, an effective leader needs to realize what situation she is in. In other words, a leader must understand the situation she is in, she must recognize the personalities she is dealing with, and must adapt her leadership style accordingly.

Analyzing the situation is not as easy as it may seem. After being part of an organization, a leader may have a general understanding of the purpose of the organization, but that is not necessarily all that makes up a particular situation. The individuals in the organization shape the situation significantly--their interests cannot be discarded. Consequently, there are two parts involved in determining the situation a leader is in: the organization's purpose, and the interests of the individuals in it. Careful analysis of these two factors will lead to some questions. Are the personal interests similar to the organization's purpose? If not, how are they different? How am I supposed to accommodate a difference between the two? Although there may be several inputs to the organization, there is one output, which becomes the answer to the question, "What is to be accomplished?" In

simple terms, in identifying the situation he is in, a leader must determine what the goals of the individuals are and relate them to the context of the organization. This process is the first principle of this leadership paradigm.

How a leader comes to recognize the goals of the group is the building block of the second principle of this paradigm. A recent wave of research on the concept of leadership has focused on leadership through followership (the West Point Thesis [Litzinger and Schaefer, 1982]; Rosenbach and Taylor, 1984; and Zierden, 1980). These theories essentially state that a person cannot be an effective leader until she has learned to be an effective follower. I agree. It is fundamental to know how to follow before you know how to lead. By knowing and understanding what motivated you to perform well, you have a certain knowledge of how a leader ought to act in similar situations. Such knowledge can be useful in determining what the goals of the group include, as well as guiding you to the best courses of action to take to achieve those goals.

A second reason for being a follower before a leader emerges from an organization's acceptance of a core of common values. A leader, if he is committed to values other than those of the group will be judged as poor. So it becomes essential at some point that the leader has been a follower within the group he is leading in order to immerse himself in the values and goals they advocate. In short, the leader must have been socialized with the group.

It is important to note here that we must not take this necessity of followership to an extreme, as some recent studies have proposed, going so far as to conclude that it is the subordinate, not the leader, who has greater control in a decision-making process (Lowin & Craig, 1968; Farris & Lim, 1969; Greene, 1975, and Zierden, 1980). Certain papers, such as Millhone's A New Perspective for Student Leadership Development, would lead us to believe that the leader is a leader only because the actions of the followers allow him to be. Based on interviews, observation, and experience, I cannot accept that conclusion. These works discount the effects of the leader on the followers' wills, attitudes, and actions. Those effects are what makes a person a leader. So while we learn to be a leader by spending time in the ranks of followers, it is ultimately the leader who influences, and therefore guides, the followers towards a common goal. An effective leader will make his followers actually want to complete tasks under his directives. Anything less is merely a formal headship, not leadership.

Followership then serves two important functions in the concept of leadership. First, it allows the leader to understand what motivates her and the followers in the group to perform well. Secondly, it gives the leader a "head start" in knowing what the situation and, therefore, the goals of the group are.

I believe a third fundamental aspect of leadership is communication. Communication is the process by which leaders

and followers exchange information. It is odd that, while there are vast bodies of research and information on both leadership and communication, there is little research or literature on the importance of communication relative to leadership. Millhone argues in his paper that leaders and followers must communicate, as communication is the process by which these groups coordinate their actions to accomplish tasks and achieve goals. However, communication in a leader and subordinate relationship is much more.

Communication is a very powerful tool. A leader who can use communication to his advantage in every situation he finds himself in is a leader who will be successful. However, just as it is a powerful tool, it can also be a source of problems if used incorrectly. Misunderstandings, misperceptions, and lack of coordination all have a starting point with poor or misused communication. Therefore, a leader, must know how to wield this power correctly, or pay the consequences for his ignorance.

In summary, then, any problem concerning the goals of leadership should begin by asking a simple question: "How should I lead?" The initial response to this question ought to be "It depends on what is to be achieved" In other words, what is the goal? This question implies that a leader must recognize the goals of the group of individuals she is leading. After such recognition occurs, it is necessary to set certain courses of action designed to achieve that goal.

How does a leader come to recognize the goals of the group? The best way to accomplish this task is to be one of the group at some point in time, i.e., you must have been a follower. Followership gives the future leader insight to what motivates individuals within the group to perform at higher standards, as well as giving him information to realize the group's goals much more easily.

The third tenet to this paradigm is the idea of communication. It is self-evident why examining communication in a leader-follower relationship is useful. Communication is an extremely powerful tool; it also creates a bond between a leader and follower.

THE PARADIGM APPLIED

Now that a broad paradigm has been established, we have the task of applying it to the subject of student leadership on a forensic team. We can now illustrate the flexibility of our paradigm by taking general principles and applying them to specific situations.

WHAT IS THE GOAL?

The paradigm initially tasks the leader to recognize the goal(s) of the group she is leading. This task may seem elementary with a forensic team, as the primary purpose of such a team is to participate in speech competitions. However, there may be many more factors involved than first seem apparent.

Individuals can have several goals, which they believe they can realize by competing on a forensic team. While some compete in forensics for the sheer enjoyment of public speech, to other, highly competitive people, winning competitions may be most important. These people may see the development of speaking skills as a goal which has already been realized, and other, more ego gratifying aspirations are in order. Perhaps, winning is necessary in order to keep a scholarship. The lure of meeting many different people could be the main attraction to other members. Some competitors may participate for a change of pace--something to do to break up the monotony of routine school life (Ryan 1990). My point is that realizing

the goals of individuals on a forensic team may be a rather difficult task.

When there is a variety of goals on a team, the leader requires certain skills in order to prioritize goals. Are the goals secondary to the importance of the individuals holding the goals? To answer these questions, the leader must ask himself the question--how should I lead? The leader must make the decision to either lead the group, or be a passive figurehead. A true leader will consider the entire group, not just certain interests within it. He must prioritize the goals in terms of importance to the whole group, as he assesses it. How he accomplishes this task may include a variety of means, including speaking to individuals, group discussions, and observation. However, it is of the utmost importance that the team's goals be realized and arranged in a way that they are indeed team goals, or the team will not work toward them, thus making the job of the leader more difficult. It is up to the leader, however, to ultimately decide what interests and goals hold the greatest importance. This is no easy task.

Let's look at a specific example which illustrates the problems which occur when the leader fails to consider everyone's goals and interests before he sets team goals. The student organization of a forensic team had a team captain, a student in charge of all divisions of the forensic team. There were assistant captains, one for the debate squad and one for the individual speech squad. With three different leaders, the need for communication between them was high. Problems arose

when the debate squad captain was pairing competitors to form teams. Two young competitors were having difficulty deciding whether or not they wanted to debate together, due to their personal feelings about each other. After some time, this friction led to a good deal of instability on the team. In turn, team members, including the debate squad captain, developed a personal resentment toward these two competitors, as they were a "problem." This feeling developed despite the fact the pair were very competitive in both debate and in individual speech events. When the pair did decide that they indeed wanted to debate together, the debate squad captain, based on his resentment, had adamantly decided not to allow them to do so. When a compromise by the team captain was made with the pair, unknown to the debate squad captain, several acute problems erupted. These problems came about because both the team captain and debate squad captain did not take into account everyone's goals. The debate squad captain did not consider the team's interests, but only attitudes based on his and others' personal feelings. This failure to consider all points of view reflects irrationalism and poor judgment. The team captain did not adequately take into account the interests of the debate squad captain, especially when making a compromise without informing him. The team captain also allowed a situation to develop where the prioritization of goals was not consistent; the debate squad captain was more concerned with the personal feelings of other senior debaters and the instability resulting from those feelings, while the

team captain was attempting to emphasize a sort of consensualism. This situation also violates the communication aspect of the paradigm, which I'll deal with later.

Obviously, it's important to consider all the individual goals, and then to prioritize them. But prioritizing the goals is only half the c allenge. Integrating these goals into the speech program effectively is the other half. Certainly, with limited resources, it is not sufficient to merely have a list of goals and expect them to materialize. In this situation a leader must use different tools--those of the manager.

Managing, in a general sense, consists of the rational assessment of a situation and the systematic allocation of resources to obtain goals based on that assessment (Levitt 73). In other words, in a management role, a person is a problem solver, compared to the leadership role, when she is a policy-maker. A leader must maximize the use of available resources. To be an effective, well-rounded leader, a person needs both leadership and managerial skills.

When managing, it is not enough to accept "how things have been in the past" concerning resources. The "limits" a forensic team has on its resources--people, time, and money--are usually limits placed on them by the leader. A leader must always look for new sources of aid. She <u>cannot</u> be satisfied with traditional limits on any resource--there is much more potential waiting for a speech program than is normally

thought. Removing these limits requires more than average effort on the leader's part, but she is a leader for a reason.

In the end, by keeping as many person's goals in mind as is possible, a leader will keep more people motivated to be a part of the group. By skillful management of resources, and even the enlargement of those resources by an innovative person, it is possible to fully realize all of the decided goals. If you make it clear to your followers that you are actively pursuing the things which they deem important, they will be much more willing to cooperate in a leader/follower relationship. Thus, your team will be working as a team and be more successful at getting what it wants.

FOLLOWERSHIP, THEN LEADERSHIP

The next general area of the paradigm addresses the importance of followership before leadership. In this sense, I am placing prerequisites upon being an effective leader.

Followership is as ambiguous a concept as leadership. A definition of followership has been offered by Millhone:

> Followership is both a process and a property...The property of followership is the set of qualities or characteristics attributed to those who are perceived to succesfully follow a leader's influence while working toward the shared mission of the group. (Millhone 4)

Such a definition of followership is a workable one. Specifically, a follower is a person who is "working toward the shared mission of the group." What does this mean for a future leader?

Followership is an important phase in learning leadership. A person who is a follower and does not pay specific attention to the many actions, decisions, and processes taking place around her is wasting a valuable lesson, unless, of course, she has no desire to lead. The principles and values of the group are mirrored by the process of working toward the shared mission of the group; by closely analyzing these values, a person can learn "what makes the group tick." A follower must examine individual decisions and actions by the leader to see how the group reacted. Such an experience will give the future leader a pool of tactics to choose from or a lesson of what not to do, should she be confronted with similar situations.

At this point, it is necessary to examine what is meant by a follower and a group, in context of this part of the paradigm. A literal interpretation here would imply that no one could ever be a leader unless she had spent a considerable amount of time with the very individuals she will be leading. This is simply not the case. Similar organizations have at least comparable goals. For example, a forensic program in Oregon will have fairly similar goals to a forensic program in Virginia. Therefore, a follower can be socialized by the values of one forensic program, and have a <u>general</u> understanding of what the values and principles of most forensic programs are. However, spending time with the specific individuals you lead is indispensable for maximizing leadership potential.

Why is prior followership so important to a leader of a forensic squad? There are several reasons: continuity of group identity, problem solving, cohesion, and development of a leadership identity among peers are some of the most important reasons.

In a followership role, the future leader realizes what type of personality and identity his forensic squad has. He can then use this knowledgr to his advantage when making difficult decisions. This "personality" also helps in prioritizing goals. If the personality is aggressive, then the goals will probably include being very competitive, e.g. winning many tournaments. If the personality is more relaxed, the goals will probably be less competitive and focused more on enjoying trips to tournaments.

Problem-solving is also a process the leader can learn while in a follower mode. The managerial skills a leader must have is not something she is born with. Rather, they are something she acquires and improves upon like any other skill. By developing these managerial skills, a leader can be much more effective when operating in the problem-solving environment. For example, by becoming familiar with administrative processes, the leader of a forensic team can better able acquire certain resources, such as money or transportation. In essence, being a follower helps prevent reinventing the wheel--you see and learn what others have done, and you expand that base.

Cohesion, especially on a speech team, is always important. Cohesiveness keeps all the members pulling in one direction, toward the common set of goals. A leader who has been socialized through the common values of the group has a certain amount of credibility already, which can only add to the cohesion on the team. In contrast, someone who has not been socialized through the values of the group has a certain presumption against him--he must prove to the team he can be a part it. Although this presumption can certainly be overcome, it takes time and effort--an obstacle a former follower has already overcome.

One of the most important developments during the followership period is the emergence of leaders. Just because there is a leader of the entire forensic squad does not mean there can be no other leaders. The followers of today have people whom they respect more, look up to more, and believe to be more credible than others. It is these people who will be the future leaders. A freshmen on the team will be followed by her peers because she is more skilled than they, because she has values that many others have in common, or simply because she is a amiable person. During this followership period, this person's peers may already accept her as their own class leader, which will mean she will be a leader in the future. In essence, what this follower has done has developed her own leadership identity during her followership phase, giving her increased credibility when she becomes the leader.

Followership first and leadership second is the student's path to successfully leading and managing a forensic program. By allowing a leader to develop through followership, a program is helping to sustain its identity, improving the problem-solving process, maintaining cohesion, and allowing potential leaders to develop their skills in a guided yet natural way. Leadership as a result of followership makes no false pretenses; a leader who is a product of the group will look out for the good of the group.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Leadership hinges on communication. Communication is how a leader establishes himself, what the followers base their perceptions of the leader on, and how the leader transfers his decisions and policies to the follower. In essence, communication is what keeps the leader/follower relationship going.

Communication on a forensic squad is important for several different reasons. Clarity of policy and action is achieved only through clear communication. Proper preparation for tournaments can only occur if a competitor knows when the tournaments are, which in turn requires communication. In general, a leader will set the attitude of the team by her communication. There are no facets of leadership of any group in which communication does not somehow play part.

Clarity of policy and courses of action require clear communication. After the leader prioritizes goals and allocates the assets properly to achieve them, he must then formulate policy to be carried out in pursuit of those goals. Unless the policy is articulated in a very clear manner, followers may be confused about exactly what they are to achieve. Furthermore, courses of action to implement policies require extensive communication. Certain policies designed to reach a goal may interfere with one another; communication between the leader and followers is necessary to prevent confusion from occurring. This potential problem does not require a leader to tell her followers how to implement a policy. Rather, it means that everyone should have a general idea of how everyone else plans to implement the policy, preventing undue interference.

To illustrate the importance of communication let's return to my earlier example of pairing debate teams. Poor communication was initiated by the two competitors in question. They were informing the leaders of their intentions on a daily basis, but each day the intentions were different. They also told the leaders different things, which created a tremendous amount of confusion. The team leader and the squad leader then had two different views of the same situation, which led to two different solutions. The poor communication continued when these solutions turned into plans of action. The team leader did not inform the squad leader of his decision to make a compromise with the competitors in question. The squad leader,

assuming his own decision would be implemented, began plans to restructure the debate squad to accommodate his decision. The remaining members of the forensic team were then receiving two different messages from two different levels of authority. These messages contradicted one another. On one hand, the team was apparently being restructured, and members were making their plans accordingly. On the other hand, it seemed the team was not going to be restructured, and members were not to concern themselves with any such change. The result was utter confusion, antagonism, and a temporary, yet severe, loss of credibility on the part of both leaders.

Proper preparation for upcoming tournaments is contingent on proper communication. It goes without saying that competing on a forensic team requires a balancing of interests--the forensic team, school, a job, and a personal life are all vying for time. In order to balance these interests, the competitor must reasonably know ahead of time which tournaments he will be competing in. This pre-planning allows for proper planning, without which, there exists conditions that are paramount to chaos (Baker 1990). Therefore, communication can serve two purposes. First, it lets the competitors know when they will be travelling, allowing them to make plans for the trip. Secondly, the communication shows the leader situations in which the schedule may need to be modified, in order to balance as many interests as possible. Proper communication from the leader and effective feedback from the followers prevents preparation for competition from turning into a nightmare.

Although the point is clear--proper communication aids an organization, dogmatic and otherwise improper communication hinders it--there is special need for communication skills on a speech team.

A leader must avoid sounding too systematic when communicating to her followers. They have most likely also studied the various theories of communication, and probably would be able to see exactly what she is doing. When communicating to them, a leader must speak to them--be informal, be personal, be herself. Yet, while setting the atmosphere of familiarity with personal communication, she cannot let such communication turn into a two-edged sword, allowing the followers to begin believing that and acting like the leader is on the same level. She is the leader, they are the followers. When that relationship becomes blurred, credibility and decision-making authority is undermined. A balance is necessary. That balance, set by communication, on one hand, allows free communication between the leader and the followers in a very personal sense, but on the other hand, does not allow that communication to be perceived as something that makes the leader just "one of the guys" on the team.

Therefore, communication on a speech team, by the very fact it is a speech team, must take on a conversational aspect. A leader must talk to his followers in a sincere, personal way. Communication must set a delicate balance to encourage openness, yet not undermine authority. Effective communication is essential to a person who plans on being a good leader.

CONCLUSION

Getting a proper perspective on student leadership in a forensic team helps achieve team goals. The principles listed here put student leaders in the right direction to get such a perspective. For those programs which already have student leadership, perhaps these principles can aid in accomplishing tasks, or even organizing what is already known. For those programs that do not include student leadership, I urge a change in policy. Student leadership benefits everyone. It gives an excellent opportunity for the student leader to develop all sorts of skills. It takes a fair amount of work off the shoulders of the director, who no doubt has many other tasks for which he or she is responsible. Most importantly, however, is the integration of the student's views into the program itself. Integrating student leadership into a forensic program allows the student leader to have influence on the decisions, as well as giving him the opportunity to integrate the influence of the people he leads. It is a no-lose situation for everyone.

Leadership in general is an ambiguous thing, and student leadership in particular is no less so. Yet we cannot deny the fact that, however obscure, leadership does exist. A forensic program is an outstanding opportunity to develop leadership skills in students, skills that can some day make them great.

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